JFK Hearings End; Questions Remain

Washington — (AP) — House investigators say they have made little headway in determining whether the crime syndicate was involved in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

On that note of frustration, the House Select Committee on Assassinations yesterday wrapped up a month of public hearings on Kennedy's death.

It has scheduled additional hearings in November on the assassination of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Staff investigators are pursuing a few remaining clues in both cases, and the committee will convene in December to reach final conclusions.

"There have been loose ends in our hearings," admitted Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), the committee chairman. "Most of them we hope to be able to tie down in our final report. But frankly, life itself contains loose ends. Not every question that can be asked can be answered."

The committee heard sworn testimony yesterday from Santo Trafficante, identified by authorities as a longtime boss of La Cosa Nostra operations in Florida.

Trafficante denied any knowledge of or participation in the assassination. But he also portrayed himself as a legitimate businessman and a patriotic American.

"Mr. Trafficante's testimony has to be evaluated in light of so much other evidence. I think it would be at least naive to accept it at face value," cautioned Ralph Salerno, a retired New York City police official and authority on organized crime.

As a committee consultant, Salerno examined extensive FBI files, including records of the bugging and wiretapping of crime syndicate figures for several months before and after Kennedy was slain in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

The records showed that mob bosses were alarmed by the Kennedy Administration's crackdown on organized crime, and some expressed hatred of the President and his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

Trafficante, because of his Cuban and CIA connections, has been the mob boss mentioned most prominently in the speculation about crime syndicate involvement.

He testified that he ran legitimate gambling casinos in Havana from about 1954 until Fidel Castro came to power and closed the casinos in 1959. He acknowledged that he lost thousands of dollars when Castro took over.

After settling in Miami, Trafficante said, he was asked by a friend in late 1960 or early 1961 to help in a CIA plot to assassinate Castro.

Trafficante said he agreed out of patriotism.

"At that time, I thought it was a good thing. He had established a Communist base 90 miles from the United States. I figured it was like a war. I thought I was helping the United States government."

Trafficante insisted he acted as nothing more than an interpreter at meetings. But an internal CIA report in 1967 described him as the courier who delivered to a Cuban contact poison pills to be placed in Castro's food. The report said the Cuban "got cold feet" and returned the pills.

Trafficante denied knowing Lee Harvey Oswald, identified by the Warren Commission as Kennedy's assassin.